

BARTŁOMIEJ ŁYCZAK

E-Mail: blyczak@gmail.com

JACEK WITECKI,
*SKARBIEC. ŻŁOTNICTWO ARCHIKATEDRY
WROCŁAWSKIEJ**

(2017), 180 PP. ISBN 978-83-65563-29-3

The treasury of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Wrocław (Breslau) contains a fascinating collection of sacral works of goldsmithery, dating from the second half of the 16th century up until the 1930s¹. The objects, in most cases of great artistic quality, were mainly executed by outstanding masters from Wrocław, but occasionally also imported from Augsburg, Nysa (Neisse), Rome, Vienna and other centres. It almost miraculously survived the siege of the city in 1945, hidden in crypts below the nave of the church and in the sacristy, while the cathedral itself was severely damaged by bombs dropped by the Red Army: the tented rooftops of the two towers fell on the nave destroying the vaults and covering the inside of the church with rubble. Even though the contents of the treasury were relatively well known, mostly thanks to publications from the beginning of the 20th century², the sacred vessels were not easily accessible to art historians conduc-

* *Treasury. Masterworks of goldsmithery from Wrocław Cathedral.*

¹ The collection is still growing, for example the catalogue includes a chalice of bishop Henryk Gulbinowicz from 1985.

² The catalogue of an exhibition of Silesian goldsmithery: *Ausstellung von Goldschmiedearbeiten schlesischen Ursprunges oder aus schlesischem Besitze*, (1905) and an inventory of Wrocław churches *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Breslau*, 1, [Die kirchlichen Denkmäler der Dominsel und der Sandinsel], ed. L. Burgermeister, (*Die Kunstdenkmäler der Provinz Niederschlesien* 1, 1930), pp. 138–148 are particularly worth mentioning. Many photographs of works from the treasury are included in: C. Gündel, *Die Goldschmiedekunst in Breslau*, (*Die Goldschmiedekunst der deutschen Städte*, 1942).

ting research on goldsmithery in Silesia, not to mention the general public³. That is why the exhibition in the National Museum in Wrocław (Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu) entitled *Treasury. Masterworks of goldsmithery from Wrocław Cathedral*, curated by Jacek Witecki, became the highlight of the season for specialists and enthusiasts of goldsmithery.

The catalogue that accompanied the exhibition was also prepared by Jacek Witecki. It consists of two main parts: an introductory essay and a catalogue of all exhibited works, preceded by a preface provided by Piotr Oszczanowski, the director of the museum. The essay starts with a short history of the Archdiocese of Wrocław, founded in the year 1000 by a patent of Otto III, as a Bishopric placed under the Archdiocese of Gniezno. Its chapter has functioned since the 11th century, as has the cathedral itself. The author puts the greatest emphasis on the events of World War II. He also gives some information on the former, late-renaissance, main altar of the church. This was commissioned by Andreas von Jerin, the bishop in 1585–1596, for a gigantic cost of 10.000 thalers. The monumental pentaptych consisted of movable wings with panels, painted by Bartholomaeus Fichtenberger, and silver figures of the crucified Christ, with Mary and St. John the Evangelist, and the four patron saints of the diocese. These figures, each more than 80 cm tall, were executed in the workshop of Paul Nitsch, one of the leading goldsmiths active in Wrocław at that time. Before the siege of Wrocław in 1945, the silver parts and the painted panels were removed from the altar and secured, but the main construction remained in the church and, in consequence, was destroyed. After the war, a restoration of the main altar was not attempted, and a late-gothic polyptych, originally from St. Mary's church in Lubin, was installed in the presbyterium. The reconstruction of the old main altar was one of the highlights of the exhibition in the National Museum; afterwards, the administrators of the cathedral decided to start a process of reinstalling the altar in its original location⁴. Paul Nitsch (active as a master goldsmith

³ They were seldom lent to exhibitions in museums until 2009, when part of the collection from the cathedral was included in the permanent exhibition in The City Museum of Wrocław (Muzeum Miejskie Wrocławia): J. Żmudziński, *Augsburskie wyroby złotnicze w katedrze we Wrocławiu. Przegląd zabytków i perspektywy badawcze*, in: *Katedra wrocławska na przestrzeni tysiąclecia. Studia z historii architektury i sztuki*, ed. R. Kaczmarek, D. Galewski, (2016), pp. 285–286.

⁴ *XVI-wieczny srebrny ołtarz wróci do katedry*, URL: <https://www.wroclaw.pl/xviwieczny-srebrny-oltarz-wroci-do-katedry> (visited on 18.04.2018).

in years 1573–1609) and his son Fabian Nitsch (active as a master goldsmith in years 1602–1630) have also provided other works, commissioned by the bishop or members of the chapter. Among them, a 155 cm-tall altar crucifix, executed by the younger master in 1610, richly decorated with enamel and 350 gemstones, is especially noteworthy. The other goldsmith, singled out in the essay, is Caspar Pfister (active as a master goldsmith in years 1598–1635), probably the best known master from Wrocław, mostly due to a study by Michał Woźniak⁵. His workshop executed numerous works for the cathedral, of which three – a reliquary of St. John the Baptist, in the form of his head on a plate (Johannesschüssel), a reliquary of St. Lucia, in the form of a figure of the Virgin Mary, in the style of the Woman of the Apocalypse, with the infant Christ in her arms, and a figure of Christ resurrected – are presented in the book.

The catalogue itself is arranged according to the type of the works presented in the following order: altars, figures, reliquaries, monstrances, chalices, crucifixes and candlesticks, canon tables, altar lamps and thuribles, other *vasa non sacra*, that is ampules, holy water pots and lavabos (incomprehensibly called “liturgical equipment”), crosses and miscellaneous items (spades, sceptres etc.), and within those divisions, placed in chronological order. Each object is reproduced in full in colour, along with chosen details and the goldsmith’s marks. The accompanying notes contain basic information on each work, along with a brief description (frankly, even too brief) and a bibliography. Unfortunately, in most cases, the bibliography is far from complete. It does not include many texts, for example, on Caspar Pfister’s reliquary of St. John the Baptist⁶ and the figure of Resurrected Christ⁷, the main altar of the cathedral⁸ and other works by

⁵ M. Woźniak, *Kasper Pfister (1571–1635), złotnik wrocławski*, in: *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej*, 3 (1983), pp. 87–105.

⁶ M. Kapustka, *Chasing the Caput. Head Images of John the Baptist in a Political Conflict*, in: *Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. C. Santing, B. Baert, A. Traninger, (2013), pp. 176–178.

⁷ Notes in catalogues of two exhibitions at the Royal Castle in Warsaw: M. Woźniak, *Posążek Chrystusa Zmartwychwstałego (Salvator Mundi)*, in: *Ornamenta Ecclesiae Poloniae. Skarby sztuki sakralnej wiek X–XVIII* ([1999]), p. 134; J. Chromy, *Caspar Pfister. Figura Chrystusa Zmartwychwstałego*, in: *Wszystko jest łaską*, (2004), p. 158.

⁸ A. Calagius, *Natales illustrium Virorum, Foeminarum, Urbium, Academiarum, et Monasteriorum*, (1609), p. 26; E. W. Braun, *Nitsch, Paul*, in: *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 25 (1931), p. 488; P. Oszczanowski, *Rodzina*

Paul and Fabian Nitsch⁹, the cross by Blasius Judelbauer (in older literature attributed to Johann Georg Pfister)¹⁰, reliquaries of St. Hedwig¹¹ and others¹². Furthermore, some publications are cited in the selected notes while being omitted in others¹³.

Despite those shortcomings, this beautifully produced catalogue meets its intended goal and functions as an introduction to the wonderful works of art kept in the treasury of Wrocław Cathedral. It will undoubtedly serve as a starting point for research on goldsmithery in Silesia, mostly due to the great quality of the photographs. One would wish, that more thorough studies on the subject, including queries on surviving archival documents, will follow.

Götzów – z historii wrocławskiego ludwisarstwa. Wstęp do badań, in: *Ludwisarstwo w Polsce*, ed. K. Kluczwajd, (2003), p. 80, 87.

⁹ J. Witecki, *Nitsch, Goldschmiede-Fam. In Breslau*, in: *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon. Die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, 92 (2016), pp. 443–444.

¹⁰ H. Król, *Twórczość dwóch złotników nyskich z 1 poł. XVIII wieku*, Marcina Vogelhunda i Jana Jerzego Pfistera, in: *Studia nad złotnictwem śląskim*, ed. J. Matuszczak, (*Rocznik Muzeum Górnośląskiego w Bytomiu. Sztuka* 6, 1973), p. 61.

¹¹ J. Gottschalk, *Hedwigsreliquiare aus 600 Jahren*, in: *Archiv für schlesischen Kirchengeschichte*, 39 (1981), pp. 171, 174; R. Kaczmarek, *Das Bild der heiligen Hedwig. Zeugnisse in der Kunst vom 13. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, in: *Das Bild der heiligen Hedwig im Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, hg. v. N. Grunewald, N. Gussone, (*Schriften des Bundesinstituts für ostdeutsche Kultur und Geschichte* 7, 1996), p. 144. It is worth adding, that there are three reliquaries of St. Hedwig originally from the Holy Cross Church in Wrocław, executed in years 1512–1513, and attributed to Andreas Heidecker. Two of them, in the form of a bust and an arm, are now kept in the treasury of Wrocław Cathedral, while the third one, a figure of the saint holding a model of a church, was transferred to St. Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin in 1773.

¹² Among others: T. Dobrowolski, *Sztuka na Śląsku*, (*Pamiętnik Instytutu Śląskiego. Seria II* 12, 1948), pp. 248, 250, 294, 295; J. Smacka, *Jan Turzo humanista i mecenas kultury renesansowej*, in: *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej*, 2 (1963), p. 90; J. Samek, *Dzieje złotnictwa w Polsce*, (1993), passim; J. Pater, *Wrocławska kapituła katedralna w XVIII wieku. Ustrój, skład osobowy, działalność*, (1998), pp. 156–157, 251–252; G. Regulska, *Gotyckie relikwiarze medalionowe na Śląsku*, in: *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 60, 3–4 (1998), pp. 406–409; J. Pater, *Fundacje artystyczne wrocławskiej kapituły katedralnej w XVIII wieku*, in: *Katedra wrocławska na przestrzeni tysiąclecia. Studia z historii architektury i sztuki*, ed. R. Kaczmarek, D. Galewski, (2016), pp. 219–221.

¹³ For example: J. M. Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik in Mitteleuropa*, (1982), p. 271 (no. 601), 298–299 (no. 814); J. Samek, *Polskie złotnictwo* (1988), passim [cited only in three notes].